



Washington State Senate

The Benton Bulletin

17TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR DON BENTON

2002 Session Update

Little time is left in the regular 60-day legislative session and two key issues have yet to be finalized—the state budget, and the transportation revenue package.

State Budget

Since my last newsletter, the budget deficit has grown from \$1.3 billion to \$1.6 billion and continues to grow. On March 5, the Senate Democrats revealed their proposal to address this major budget deficit—as usual, short-term solutions for long-term problems. The proposal mortgages our state's future by once again using one-time money—this time from the tobacco settlement—to fill the gap between state revenues and state spending.

Transportation Revenue

The House Democrats introduced a transportation revenue package (HB 2969) that would go to the voters for approval by June 20 this year.

The revenue package includes:

- A 4-cent gas tax increase each of the next two years: October 2002 and October 2003. This would raise \$6.1 billion over 10 years and cost residents approximately \$57 per year
- A 20 percent increase in the tax on truck and weight fees
- A 0.8 percent sales tax on new and used vehicles
- Establishes a Transportation Accountability Board, with State Auditor Brian Sonntag as a member
- A list of specific statewide projects
- Distribution: \$3.7 billion for traffic safety improvements and congestion relief; \$148 million for freight mobility; \$765 million for passenger ferries and other transportation needs; \$595 million for auto ferries; and \$333 million for local governments (coming from 1 cent of the gas tax)

One of the major sticking points for me is the provision that increases the sales tax on new and used vehicles. I do not believe that a sales tax on vehicles should be any different from any other goods on which we pay a sales tax. This is a departure from the norm and would only set us up for further categorizing sales tax goods—what's next, a higher sales tax on junk food?

The proposal has passed the full House and is currently in the Senate Transportation Committee. I value your opinion on this very difficult issue and would love to hear your thoughts on this plan. Please call 1-800-562-6000 and let me know what you think.

Capital Budget Passed by Senate Could Create 1,800 New Private Sector Jobs

If the House concurs with the Senate, the capital budget projects list will likely result in 1,800 new jobs and save about 2,700 jobs from the chopping block. Projects include building, repairing or improving state-owned buildings, community college facilities, public schools, and public parks. (ESB 6396)

The capital budget, negotiated by Senators Joe Zarelli and Darlene Fairley, contains \$17 million devoted to the Columbia River deepening project. As you may know, the Columbia River has lost business to deeper river thoroughfares that can accommodate larger ships. Currently, the Columbia is three feet too shallow for the large-scale ships—those ships have simply gone elsewhere. This project will deepen the river by three feet, encouraging the large-scale ships to come to our ports.

Projects for Clark College, Lower Columbia Community College and the Department of Fish and Wildlife were also funded in the Senate capital budget.

Business Climate and Jobs Bills Pass Senate

On February 27, Senate Republicans, joined by one Democrat, were successful in bringing five critical pro-jobs bills to a full Senate vote.



Senator
Don Benton

Committee assignments:

- Transportation, Ranking Republican Member
- Labor, Commerce & Financial Institutions

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Approved and sent to the House are:

- SB 6252 limits the rule-making authority of certain entities to those instances where there is a specific grant of legislative authority.
- SB 6749 eliminates the current burden on a business or citizen to prove that an agency action or rule is invalid.
- SB 6564 requires significant rules to sit through one legislative session before taking effect; and requires agencies to make a good faith effort to notify businesses affected by new significant rules.
- SB 6251 requires gubernatorial approval of all agency rules.
- SB 6793 changes provisions relating to expanding public water systems.

Local Motor Vehicle Excise Tax Repealed

The measure to eliminate the local transit motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) is now law. When the Legislature repealed the state MVET in 2000, language was left in the law that made it unclear if the local MVET could continue. The matter went to the courts, and a recent ruling found that local transit authorities could impose the tax. Legislators acted quickly to repeal the language in question. Governor Locke signed Senate Bill 6036 into law, a measure almost identical to one I introduced during the past two sessions (SB 5959).

Sex Offender Bill Passes Senate Unanimously But Dies in the House

The Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA), a division of the state Department of Social and Health Services, took

aim at my bill, SB 6501, designed to limit the proximity in which released juvenile rapists can live near their victim. I introduced this legislation when I learned that a juvenile sex offender in the Vancouver area had been released from incarceration, only to return home two blocks away from his young victim. There are too many protections for criminals in our society and not enough for their victims. Killing this bill forces the victims to relive their horrendous experience once again when their assailant moves in down the street. There is no justice in that. I will continue this effort by trying to amend the language from this bill onto another bill that is still alive and moving through the legislative process.

Should Unions and other organizations get permission every year before deducting money from paychecks to pay for political activities?

Sponsors of SB 6713 don’t think so. Under this measure, now before the House, the yearly requirement that employees be asked if they want to support a cause is eliminated. Now the burden is on the employee if he or she wants the deduction stopped. Opponents say this measure allows the money to be used for a variety of causes, without checking back with the employee when the union or organization wants to promote or oppose something different from when the employee originally authorized the deduction.

I have had the pleasure of having the following young citizens of our district come to Olympia during the 2002 legislative session to serve as Senate pages:
Nathan Mielke, Jesse Sunde, Andrei Guild and Rachel Fawcett

Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about. Or call the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000.



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